

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 23 August 2021

PRESENT – Councillors Crudass (Chair), Mrs Culley, Snedker, Sowerby and Willis

STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None

APOLOGIES – Councillors Ali, C L B Hughes, Lister and Renton, Carly Spence, Tim Fisher, Nick Lindsay and John Armitage

ABSENT – Councillors Bell and Lucas; Malcolm Frank, Maura Regan and Janet Woodcock

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Jane Kochanowski (Assistant Director of Children's Services), Allison Hill (Democratic Officer) and Calvin Kipling (Virtual Head Teacher)

CYP8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP9 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 JUNE 2021

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 21 June 2021.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 21 June 2021 be approved as a correct record.

CYP10 DESIGNATED OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) to present the Annual report and update Members on the progress and performance of the Designated Officer, April 2020 to March 2021 and to highlight the required actions for April 2021 to March 2022.

The submitted report outlined the function of the Designated Officer in line with national guidance and the requirement of all organisations working with children in Darlington to have policies and procedures in place on what their organisation should do when an allegation is made against an employee/volunteer who has contact with children.

It was reported that these policies and procedures were in line with Darlington Safeguarding Partnership multi-agency procedures.

RESOLVED – (a) That the Annual Report and the work undertaken during 2021/22 and the priorities of the Designated Officer service for 2021/22 be agreed and noted.

(b) That all agencies consider how to promote the role of the Designated Officer within their own organisation.

CYP11 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PUBLIC HEALTH OVERVIEW

The Director of Public Health submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an update of the Children and Young People Public Health interventions and programs namely the Healthy Lifestyles Survey 2021, the Childhood Healthy Weight Plan, mental health in schools projects and the 0-19 Service.

It was reported that the Healthy Lifestyles Survey was delivered to 8500 pupils across 33 schools completing the survey annually; between April and June 2020, the Public Health team delivered virtual focus groups and online surveys with pupils from year 5 to year 10, parents and carers and school staff; and responses were received from 167 pupils, 32 parents and carers and 41 school representatives.

The Childhood Healthy Weight Plan aims to increase a healthy weight in children and young people and the objectives are focused to increase fibre and fruit and vegetable uptake, reduce sugar by increasing healthy food and drink swaps and aim to achieve 60 minutes of physical activity for every child and young person in the borough; and partnership work has resulted in the coproduction of a looked after young people and families toolkit, a children's home food policy and a nutrition education staff training programme.

With regard to mental health in schools it was reported that the Children and Young Peoples (CYP) Mental Health Network continued to meet and provide an overview of CYP Mental Health on a fortnightly basis and the group had highlighted that children and young people are still being affected by COVID-19 in terms of mental health; the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and other services are noticing increased referrals although some of this may be due to the backlog when services could only be provided face to face for some patients with more complex needs; and to support staff in schools a Suicide Prevention Grant programme for training in relation to suicide prevention and self-harm was launched in June and the two applications submitted by Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College and St. Aidan's Academy were successful in receiving £2000 each.

It was also reported that the 0-19 Service had introduced an enhanced digital offer to children and families during the Covid-19 pandemic and as restrictions were lifted the Service introduced more face to face appointments, while continuing to build on the success of the virtual offer.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CYP12 SELF ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with the Annual Self- Assessment for Children's Services to enable constructive 'critical friend' challenge to take place and drive improvement in public services.

It was reported that Children's Services update each quarter an assessment of social work

practice, inclusive of Early Help, based on changes in performance data. To bring the information into a stand-a-lone easy read document an annual self-assessment overview document is completed.

It was highlighted that the aim of the self-evaluation was to answer three questions: What do we know about the quality and impact of social work practice in our local authority; How do we know it; and What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice. The self-assessment is used as part of Ofsted's ILACS Annual Engagement Meeting and plays an important role in their understanding of local authorities and how they work.

RESOLVED – That the report is noted.

CYP13 TRAUMA AND HORIZON SCANNING

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) at the request of Members to provide an overview of 'Trauma Informed Practice' and how Children's Services are starting to embed and respond to Trauma and to outline the work towards becoming a Trauma Informed Service.

It was reported that Trauma is conceptualised in a broad spectrum, from the impact of poverty to the significant events that can be thought of in terms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (having a clear clinical start point). Trauma for children, young people and families can also occur via interaction with professionals and organisations, particularly when the approach does not follow a relational and strength-based methodology.

The submitted report highlighted that Trauma Informed Practice is relational and strengths-based, grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma. It was also reported that in Children's Services the overarching practice methodology was based on Strengthening Families and Relational Practice therefore Trauma Informed Practice would fit seamlessly into the embedded approach to working with families.

The Virtual Head advised Members that from September the role of the Virtual School was expanding and will embed the Trauma Informed approach with the authorities Looked After Children and discussion ensued on the training with the majority of schools in Darlington attending and each school has an Designated Teacher who attends networking meetings. Training provided for Governing Bodies had also been well attended.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CYP14 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE - OFF FRAMEWORK PLACEMENTS

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) at the request of the Members to provide an overview of children in care who are placed in provision that is 'off – framework'.

The submitted report outlined several rationales to why off-framework provision is commissioned and outlined annual costing and comparison with placements made 'on-framework'; outlined the average off framework residential placement cost for Darlington in 2020/21 was £3,791 per week compared with £3,069 per week on Framework; advised that

the number of off framework residential placements is 66 per cent based on all residential placements made in 2020/21 but was reflective of regional and national trends; and highlighted that within Independent Fostering, Darlington had a comparatively low number of off framework placements comprising 25 per cent of all placements at any one time.

General discussion ensued on the cost of off framework placements and the number of complex factors that whereby placement demands significantly outstrip placement availability and it was highlighted that placements were not necessarily more costly because they were off framework. The Assistant Director of Children's Services emphasised that off framework placements can be the most suitable for some young people and can include education on site and work was constantly ongoing to review placements and placement costs and to analyse the cohort of Looked after Children.

Members questioned if there was any help the authority could offer to small local providers who find the bureaucracy associated with large framework contracts and procurement prohibitive and the Assistant Director of Children's Services assured Members that Children's Services were working with providers and commissioners to provide encouragement and assistance.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CYP15 WORK PROGRAMME

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest should be included in the previously approved work programme

The submitted report advised Members that Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee had requested that Youth Unemployment be included in this Scrutiny's work programme and had proposed a joint piece of work to be undertaken with Children and Young People Scrutiny. Members discussed the request to undertake a joint piece of work to examine the impact of youth unemployment on the economy, apprenticeship schemes and the numbers claiming benefits and agreed to lead on this work.

It was noted that an item raised at the last meeting to be included in the work programme to examine and understand what services and funding was provided by the Tees Valley will no longer be added to this Scrutiny work programme as Children's Services did not receive any direct money from the Tees Valley Combined Authority and therefore may be an area for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee to examine as part of their work programme.

RESOLVED – (a) That the work programme be noted.

(b) That a joint review on Youth Unemployment be undertaken with Economy and Resources Scrutiny.

CYP16 ASSISTANT DIRECTOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Chair, on behalf of the Members of this Scrutiny Committee, offered thanks to Jane

Kochanowski for her assistance to this Committee and wished her well for the future as she takes her retirement from the authority.

RESOLVED – That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to Jane Kochanowski, the Assistant Director of Children’s Services upon her retirement.